

1. THE PLANNING CONTEXT

A range of regional, historical, environmental, and economic factors will influence future growth and development possibilities in Panama. This chapter summarizes background materials related to this overall context which were collected to help make local planning decisions more informed. Discussions focus on the most important implications of these materials, identifying critical opportunities and constraints.

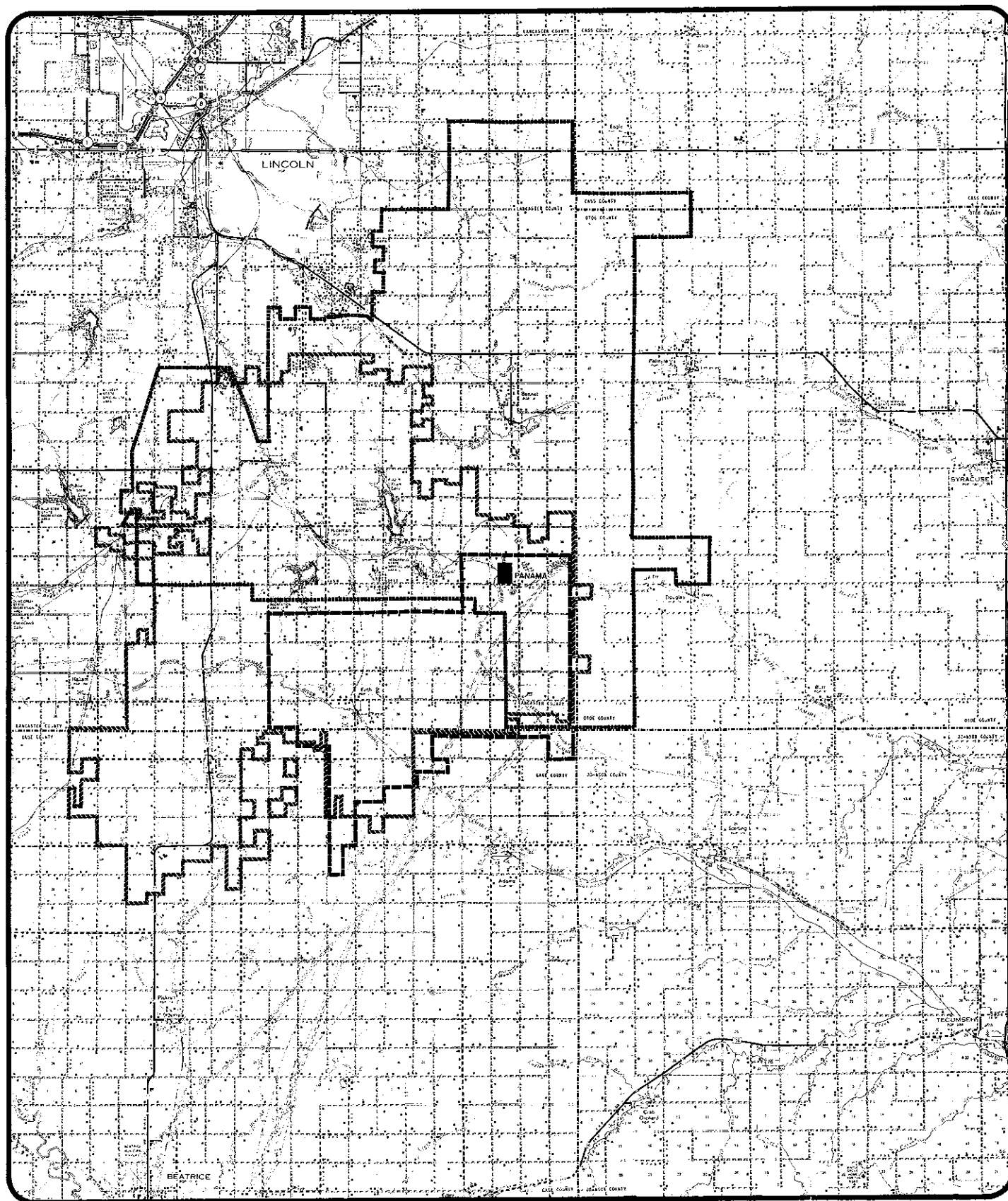
REGIONAL SETTING

The Village of Panama is located in southeast Lancaster County, one-half mile west of State Highway 43, just off State Spur 55D (see Map 1). It is part of the Lincoln-Lancaster Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (SMSA). The future of Panama is integrally connected to the overall growth patterns and economic conditions of this larger metropolitan region.

The City of Lincoln, located 15 miles northwest of the village, is the focal point of the region. It exerts a major influence on the village in terms of employment, commercial services, and public facilities.

The area between Panama and Lincoln is primarily rural and devoted to agriculture, although new residential estate development has occurred near Lincoln. Several larger incorporated villages, including Hickman and Bennet, are also located in this area. Several other nearby communities, including Firth, Douglas, Holland, and Adams, contain services of interest to local residents.

Many local public systems and services are provided by regional or special-purpose agencies. The village is located in the Nemaha Watershed and is under the jurisdiction of the Nemaha Natural Resource District. Public school services are provided by the Norris Consolidated School District No. 160, with elementary and high school facilities south of Hickman. Electricity is obtained from Nebraska City Utilities. Solid waste collection is currently being provided as part of a countywide program.



REGIONAL SETTING

- NORRIS SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 160
- - - - - FIRTH FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT
- LANCASTER COUNTY RURAL WATER DISTRICT NO. 1

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0 1 2 3 4 5

SCALE IN MILES

1

Although Panama maintains its own water supply, Rural Water District 1 provides supplementary water service support. The village also operates under an agreement with the Fifth Fire Protection District whereby the district provides firefighting equipment which is manned by local volunteers. All of these services are either partially influenced or totally controlled by agencies outside the community.

Panama must plan for its future within this regional setting. Local strategies for land development, increasing the village tax base, and recruiting commercial services must relate to this larger context. The village must keep abreast of regional issues and opportunities in order to advocate Panama's interests within the regional community more effectively.

COMMUNITY HISTORY

Originally a small farming community, Panama was founded in the late 1870s and became a town in 1888. The village developed around the Missouri Pacific rail line, which provided regular train service between Crete and Auburn, and soon began to expand north and south of the tracks.

In 1904, the village was incorporated and the town ordinance and bylaws were adopted. Local sources say the new community was named after the Panama Canal, which was being discussed during this period.

Many of the local community facilities and service systems date from these early years: construction of the first post office and town hall and organization of the Bank of Panama and the Panama Presbyterian Church all occurred prior to 1900. The village had a number of other public services during the early part of the 20th Century which have since been discontinued, including a local school system, a town newspaper, two other churches, and even a local band and orchestra.

Although the village has changed during the past few decades, many of its functions and characteristics have remained constant. It is still a strong family-oriented residential community. Its highly attractive physical environment and "village" character have been maintained, and local residents still have a strong sense of community pride and identity. According to the recent *Community Attitude Survey*, most residents choose Panama as their home because of its friendliness and peacefulness, its general appearance, and because they feel it is a better place in which to raise their children.

These are the characteristics which give Panama its community identity. Although many are intangible and difficult to define, they are nonetheless quite important. As the village plans for future growth and development, it should build upon and enhance these special characteristics.

POPULATION

Population totals and characteristics provide basic yardsticks for comprehensive planning. They help determine space required for future land-use activities and capacity needed for future community facilities and services.

Current Population

Panama's population peaked in the early part of the 20th Century and has gradually declined from a high of 230 in 1910 to a low of 153 in 1970. Since 1970, the village has experienced a very slight increase, with the January, 1976, population estimated at approximately 167 persons. Of this total, 16 persons or nine percent were under the age of six; 32 (19 percent) were between the ages of six and 18; and 35 (21 percent) were 60 years or older.¹

Future Population Growth

Panama's future population growth will depend upon a variety of factors both internal to the community and within the larger regional context. Most indicate some growth potential. These include:

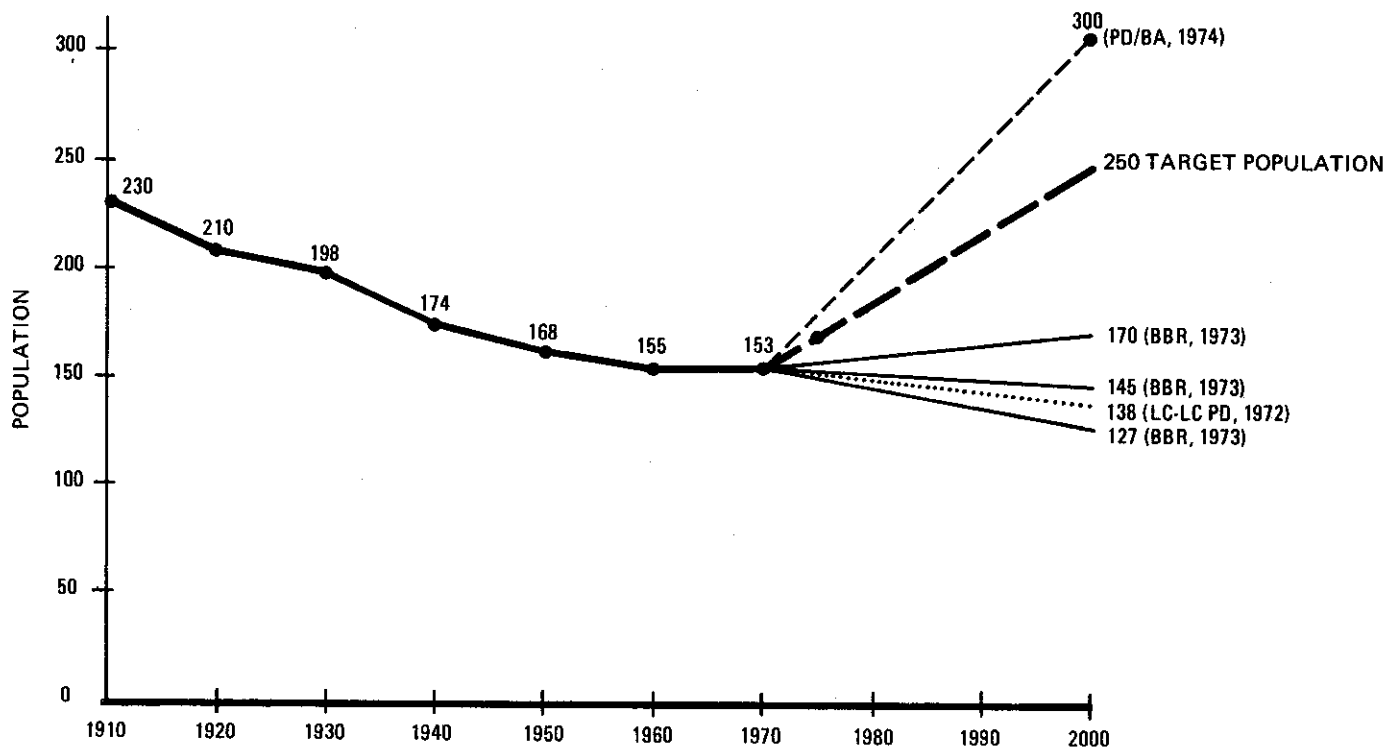
- *Overall county growth policy*, which affects growth potentials within the village itself. As a part of its regional planning study, Lancaster County has endorsed a policy of preserving agricultural and environmental qualities within the county. It forecasts major growth for the county over the next 25 years. While most of this will occur in Lincoln, growth policies do suggest that Panama and other rural communities also will experience some future growth.
- *Attractiveness of the village as a place in which to live*, which could influence future decisions on housing location. Panama is relatively close to the major economic, employment, and service activities in Lincoln, and its environmental amenities and human qualities could offer an attractive option to those desiring a small town, semi-rural living environment.
- *Local attitudes concerning future growth*, which determine how receptive the village will be to new development. Most Panama residents favor some future growth, provided the community's traditional "village" characteristics can be maintained. A substantial majority of those responding to the recent *Community Attitude Survey* favored a total population of between 165 to 300 persons by the year 2000.

¹Based on local estimates.

- *Land suitability*, which determines the appropriateness of the village for new development. The recently adopted *Community Goals* call for new development in areas contiguous to existing development. Topography, soils, and land-use characteristics determine how suitable this land will be for new development. However, availability of these lands depends largely on individual landowner decisions.
- *The costs of public improvements to serve new development*, which influence the financial feasibility of future growth. New development will increase demands on water, sewer, and other utilities, and require extensions of other community services. The costs of providing these support services suggest a gradual rate of future growth.

Population Projections

Several recent studies have included projections of future population for Panama. These projections, coupled with the potential growth factors described above, provide the basis for establishing a target population for the village (see accompanying population graph).



- *The Bureau of Business Research* at the University of Nebraska, forecast population for Nebraska counties and incorporated communities on a statewide basis in 1973. Low, medium, and high figures were projected for Panama, ranging from 127 to 170 persons for the year 2000.
- *The Lincoln City-Lancaster County Planning Department* forecast population for county communities in 1972. A year 2000 population of 138 persons was projected for Panama.
- *The Planning Department*, assisted by Barton-Aschman Associates, Inc., prepared estimates on a countywide basis in 1974. Based on new overall county growth policies, a year 2000 population of 300 persons was estimated for Panama.

Target Population

Based on growth potentials and community attitudes within Panama, a year 2000 target population of approximately 250 persons has been used for comprehensive planning purposes.

The Comprehensive Plan should respond to the land-use, transportation, and community facility implications of this population but it should also be flexible enough to accommodate minor fluctuations either above or below the target number.

ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK

Panama functions as a part of the larger metropolitan economic system. It is strongly influenced by and integrated with the City of Lincoln, which provides the bulk of both employment opportunities and commercial services. Of the 81 local residents who are currently employed, 41 work in Lincoln, 30 in Panama, and 10 work elsewhere. The village provides jobs for only six persons living outside the community. The village's current size and growth potential indicate that the local economy will not function independently in the future.

Panama is one of the more fortunate county communities in that it has maintained considerable local economic activity. There is a strong loyalty to local merchants. Although Lincoln will continue to be the economic focal point, Panama should strive to maintain and supplement its local convenience commercial and service activities.

In addition to providing needed services to local residents, commercial and industrial activities make important contributions to the local tax base. Without these activities, municipal services must continue to

be financed by residential property taxes and user fees or by financial assistance obtained from state and federal agencies.

The *Community Attitude Survey* and the *Community Development Goals* indicate that most residents favor attracting new businesses. As the village continues to plan for its future, it should consider possible strategies for both attracting new commercial and industrial development and for encouraging expansion of existing operations as market potentials increase. It should also carefully review federal and state financial assistance programs which may have potential for local application.

NATURAL CONDITIONS

Natural conditions influence the physical form of Panama and the directions which future growth should take. They pose both opportunities and constraints for new development. The most important of these are topography and soils.

Topography

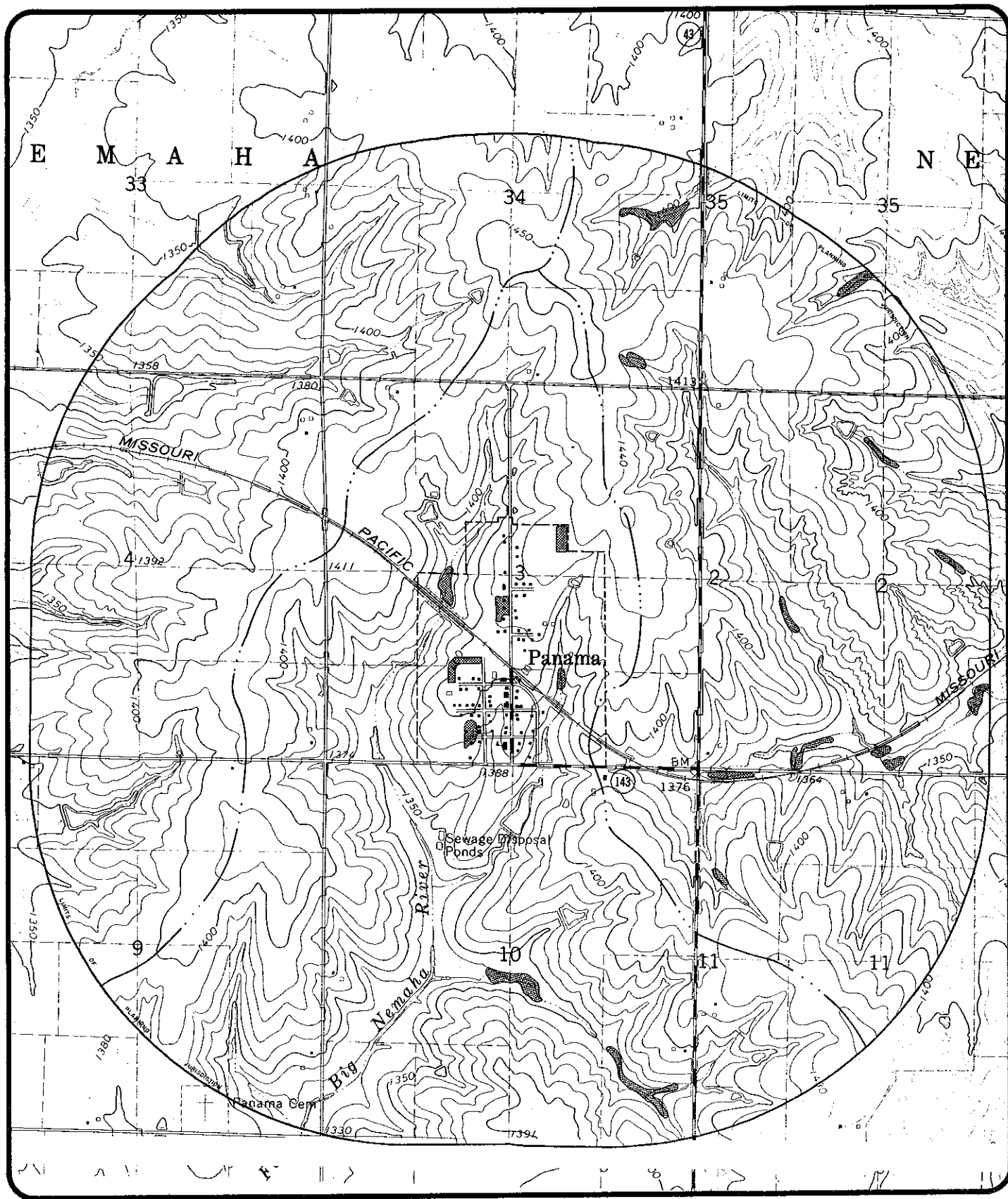
Panama lies in the headwaters area of the North Branch of the Big Nemaha River, between two intermittent stream beds east and west of the village, which are tributary to the North Branch (see Map 2). The village itself lies on gently rolling topography, which allows for good surface drainage. Surface runoff flow is essentially northeast to southwest, through the small swale which bisects the community and to the two small tributaries.

The few natural tree masses which remain within the planning area are located along the two stream beds, primarily north of the railroad. These represent environmental amenities and should be preserved where possible.

While the local topography poses no severe development constraints, it does have certain growth implications. If new growth occurs in areas which are too low in elevation, it cannot be served by the existing trunk lines of the gravity flow sewer collection system and would require new facilities.

Soils

The capacity of local soils to support different land-use activities is an important consideration in comprehensive planning. While detailed analyses and test borings are required to evaluate specific building sites, generalized soil interpretations are useful in pinpointing potential development problems.



TOPOGRAPHY

ELEVATIONS ARE MEAN SEA LEVEL
CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET

- DRAINAGE DIVIDE
- TREE MASSES

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0 1000 2000
SCALE IN FEET

2

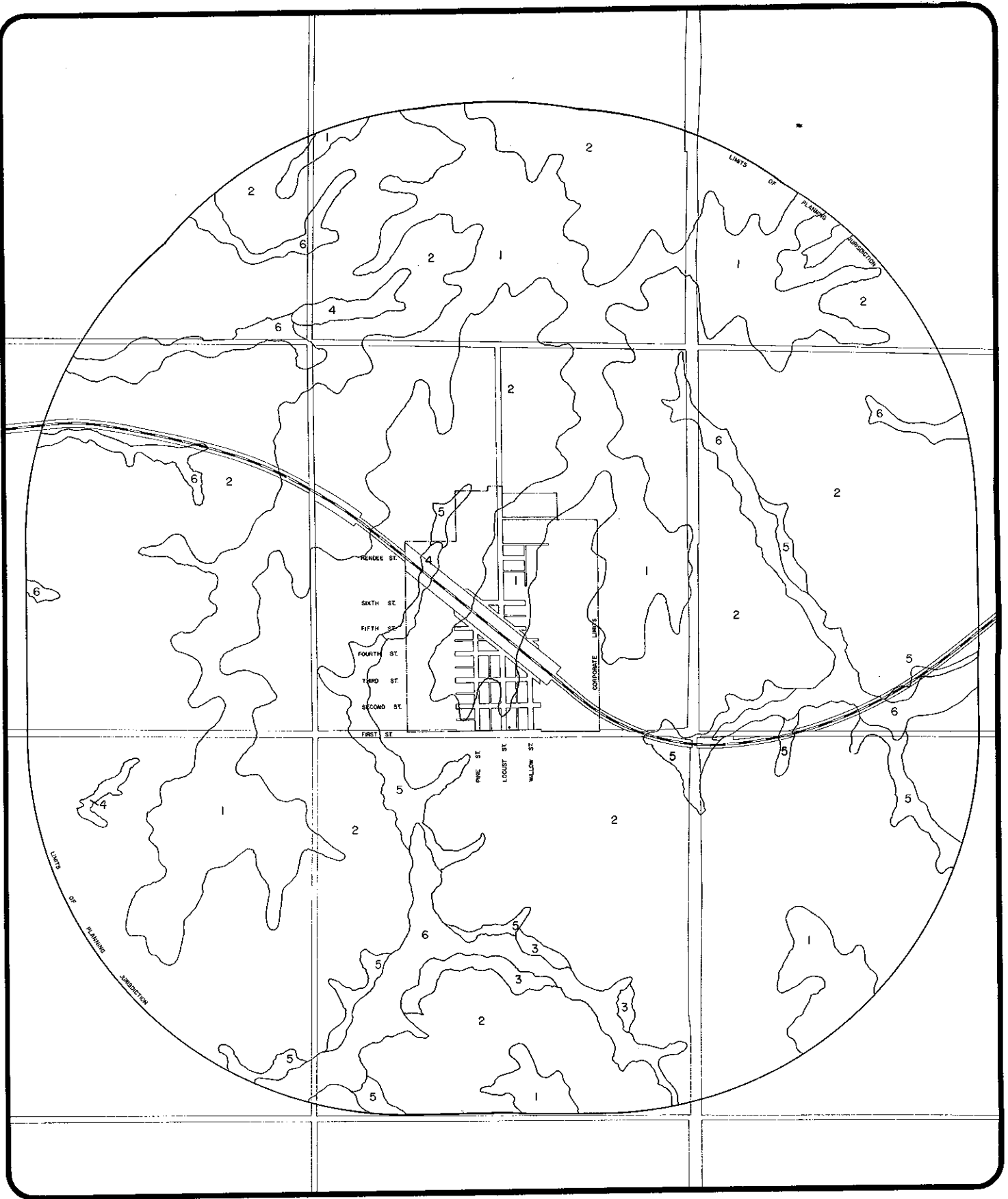
Soils in the Panama planning area, illustrated on Map 3, are discussed briefly below. Soil interpretation and mapping information are based on USDA Soil Conservation Service data. Soil surveying is being accelerated with funding from the Lower Platte South Natural Resources District.

- *Wymore, Pawnee, and Mayberry* soils are the most prevalent. The high shrink-swell potential of these clay soils presents problems for the construction of foundations and roadbeds unless adequate precautions are taken. These upland soils increase the risk of water seepage into basements as one moves lower on sideslopes. Drainage tile may be needed in certain locations.
- *Crete and Butler* soils, occupying the ridges on the uplands, are also prominent in the Panama area. The high shrink-swell potential also poses problems for foundations and roadbeds. Water seepage is a problem, and finished grades should be sloped away from structures. Fertile topsoil should be retained.
- *Judson* soils occupy colluvial footslopes and alluvial fans. These soils occur along the stream west of the village. They are among the most productive agricultural soils in the county. Building limitations are slight to moderate.
- *Sharpsbury-Nodaway-Pawnee* is an undifferentiated mapping unit. Sharpsbury and Pawnee soils occupy steep slopes, and Nodaway soils occur in frequently flooded bottomland areas. These are not suited for development and should be left to wildlife and grazing. They also occur along the stream west of the village.
- *Steinauer and Burchard* soils occur in limited amounts in the rural area outside the village. They are strongly sloping, well drained, and occupy sideslopes on uplands. Their primary building limitation is due to slope.
- *Colo and Kennebec* soils also occur in limited amounts outside the village. Formed on bottomlands, their potential for flooding is a building hazard. Where practical, these areas should be restricted to low intensity uses such as agriculture, open space, or recreation.

With the exception of the Sharpsburg-Nodaway-Pawnee soils northwest of the built-up portion of the village, soils within or adjacent to the village can be made suitable for development, provided certain building precautions are taken. With the exception of Judson, all soils in the Panama planning area have severe limitations for the use of septic tanks. Centralized wastewater treatment will be necessary for any new development.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GOALS

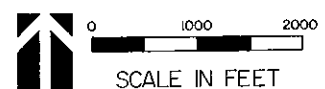
To be effective, the Comprehensive Development Plan must respond to the special needs, values, and desires of Panama residents. The locally



SOILS

1. CRETE & BUTLER
2. WYMORE, PAWNEE & MAYBERRY
3. STEINAUER & BURCHARD
4. SHARPSBURG-NODAWAY-PAWNEE
5. JUDSON
6. KENNEBEC & COLO

PANAMA, NEBRASKA COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT PLAN



3

prepared Community Development Goals provide this specialized guidance. In essence, these goals transform collective community values into operational statements which can be used as guidelines for the planning program.

Local residents, led by the Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee, prepared a series of goal statements which relate to land-use development, housing, community facilities and services, transportation, and the environment. They represent local consensus and reflect intense citizen involvement. Collectively, they indicate where the community wants to go and what it wants to become in the future. They call for a special kind of village environment and have provided the basis for planning future growth and development.

The Comprehensive Plan responds to the adopted Community Goals listed in Appendix 1.2 However, values change with time. What is preferred today may not hold true in the future. As values change, these goals must be reevaluated to determine if they still represent the kind of community local residents actually want.

²Community Development Goals were adopted by the Panama Planning Commission on December 1, 1975, and the Panama Village Board on December 2, 1975.